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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Consumer
Service

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Mountain Plains
Region

1244 Speer Blvd.
Denver, CO
80204-3581

Reply to
Attn. of: SP-97-20

Subject: Questions and Answers Regarding the School Meals
Initiative for Healthy Children

To: STATE AGENCY DIRECTORS - Colorado ED, Iowa, Kansas,
(Child Nutrition Programs) Missouri ED, Montana OPI,
Nebraska ED, North Dakota,
South Dakota, Utah and
Wyoming ED

Please find attached another set of "Questions and Answers" issued
regarding the School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children.

If you have any questions, please contact the Special Projects
Section at (303) 844-0355.

Ann C. Degroat

ANN C. DEGROAT
Regional Director
Child Nutrition Programs

Attachment

cc: Colorado DPHE, Colorado HS, Missouri DH, Montana DPHHS,
Nebraska SS, Wyoming DHSS

**SCHOOL MEALS INITIATIVE
FOR HEALTHY CHILDREN**

Questions and Answers

1. What guidance does USDA plan to provide on the selection of a menu planning method?

The Department has provided a number of materials to assist schools with implementation, and other materials are being developed or planned. Schools have already received a *Tool Kit for Healthy School Meals*, which includes new recipes designed to comply with the Dietary Guidelines, and the Department has provided States with a complete menu operation system that can be used for Assisted NuMenus. The *Menu Planner for Healthy School Meals*, which serves as a companion to the training manual developed for local schools, is expected to be available shortly. We also expect to have a revised Food Buying Guide available for School Year 1998/1999. The Department is also developing a revised *Meal Pattern Requirements and Offer Versus Serve* manual to reflect the updated nutrition requirements and to clarify the menu planning options available to local schools. We anticipate that this manual will be available by late Fall of 1998.

2. Must all menu items or foods offered as part of a reimbursable meal (and therefore included in the nutrient analysis) be offered before the point of service?

All menu items planned as part of a reimbursable meal need to be available before the point of service to ensure that the cashier can determine that a reimbursable meal has been taken. However, schools may offer certain extra items which have no direct bearing on the eligibility of the meal for reimbursement but would be counted in the nutrient analysis even when they are placed beyond the point of service. Another example would be a free salad bar available to all children in the cafeteria regardless of whether or not they received a reimbursable meal. In these situations, the amount of food taken by children who also received reimbursable meals would be estimated and included in the nutrient analysis. Schools electing to use one of the food-based systems will need to include estimates of these items on their production records so that the State agency can count them as part of its nutrient analysis of meals served as part of the reimbursable food service.

3. What is the status of the National Nutrient Database?

The Department has issued updated fact sheets on commodities. We are proceeding with a contract to input information on processed foods into the National Nutrient Data Base for Child Nutrition Programs. This new release will include updated information on commodities, reference foods and USDA recipes. We expect that the first of this new information will be available by October 1997.

4. What is needed for production records under NuMenus?

The computer printout generated in the course of planning the meal service will generally be the production record. Foods prepared as part of the a la carte service and foods that are left over would be factored out.

5. Are there any limitations on the types of yogurt products that may be credited?

The crediting of yogurt does not extend to noncommercial and/or nonstandardized yogurt products, such as frozen yogurt, homemade yogurt, yogurt flavored products, yogurt bars, yogurt covering on fruits and/or nuts and similar products.

6. How large must a grain/bread item be in order to count toward the overall grain/bread requirement?

In order to be applied toward the total grain/bread requirement, a grain/bread item must meet or exceed one-fourth of the serving size for that item.

7. Are there differences over the method used for crediting cereal grains as compared to flour, germ and meal?

Flour, germ and meal are all credited by weight. Cooked and prepared cereals, pasta and rice may be determined by weight or volume, depending on which method the meal planner considers more appropriate.

8. The Grain/Bread Instruction provides the Attachment A as an exhibit for serving size contributions of different categories of foods that provide grain/bread equivalencies. Are these recommended as serving sizes?

Attachment A is provided as guidance only. These foods and their equivalency to a serving of bread need not be used in the specific amount as specified. You may serve a smaller or bigger portion to fit the menu. If a product serving size or weight is cut in half it will result in half a serving of bread. If the serving size or weight is doubled you will achieve two servings of bread. Local recipe products or commercial products that differ in size but make a grain/bread contribution equal to those in Attachment A may be served in whatever portion size the menu planner determines as feasible. The contribution continues to be measured by 14.75 grams of enriched or whole grain meal or flour to equal one serving of grain/bread.

9. As a manufacturer of a product, may I produce a serving of grain/bread and do my own calculations for the bread equivalency? What assurance does the school need to get full credit when using my product?

Manufacturers are encouraged to provide the schools with data that identifies the equivalency of the grain/bread contribution as determined by the formula for specific products. USDA allows schools to use this data even if it is inconsistent with equivalencies in Attachment A. Manufacturers should be prepared to provide schools with documentation that justifies the credit claim if they are asked to do so.